

Drama

1920-1921

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The Assassination of Abraham Lincoln

Charles Francis Byrne

Excerpts from newspapers and other
sources

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SAW LINCOLN SHOT



CHARLES FRANCIS BYRNE
Who played "Captain de Boots" in
"Our American Cousin," on April
14, 1865, when President Lincoln was
shot in Ford's Theatre. Mr. Byrne
lives at 4929 Boudinot st.

RECALLS LINCOLN'S DEATH

Actor on Stage Fateful Night Lives
Hero With Son

Charles Francis Byrne, one of the actors who took part in the presentation of "Our American Cousin" stood not more than fifteen feet from the Presidential box, in the Ford Theatre, when John Wilkes Booth fired the shot that ended the life of Lincoln.

Mr. Byrne who lives with his son, C. Thompson Byrne, at 4920 Boudinot st., celebrated his eighty-third birthday Friday. The memory of that tragic night is firmly imprinted on his memory. The darkened theatre, the flag draped box, the play, then the shot and pandemonium. Booth shouting "Sic Semper Tyrannis" as he leaped from the box, breaking his leg, and running through the place making his escape. All this Mr. Byrne recalls graphically.

Mr. Byrne has never taken part in any other play since that night.

PHILADELPHIA

Bulletin

2-11-28

PHILA. ACTOR SAW LINCOLN TRAGEDY

Charles F. Byrne, 79 Today,
Was in Cast Night President
Was Assassinated

RECALLS SCENE VIVIDLY

The few living persons who were present at Ford's Theatre, Washington, on the night that Abraham Lincoln was assassinated may recall the actor who played the part of Captain De Boots in "Our American Cousin."

Captain De Boots, of that April night in 1865, is Charles Francis Byrne, 2028 North Eighteenth street, whose seventy-ninth birthday is today. Today, white-haired and crippled, he sits in the little parlor of his home and recalls the time he played before Lincoln. He is one of the two surviving members of the company which was playing in Ford's on April 14, 1865.

Mr. Byrne, who is a native of Baltimore, was on the stage only during the period when he played in "Our American Cousin." After the tragedy in Ford's Theatre he forsook the stage life. He had been taken on to play a small extra part and in a short time had won the role of Captain De Boots.

"I shall never forget the performance at Ford's that night," he said speaking through his son's interpretation. "Most of the prominent Government officials were in the theatre and we were all nervous, playing before the President, who sat in one of the stage boxes.

"When the assassination occurred I was at the far end of the stage. I was in the midst of a speech when I was startled by a revolver shot. For a moment there was perfect silence in the theatre.

"Then I saw the figure of Booth in the box. There was a struggle as he pushed his way from the edge of the box and leaped to the stage. Then a wild roar broke from the audience, many women shrieking hysterically.

"Several of us who were on the stage attempted to stop Booth, but he was too quick for us. He darted through the wings and thence to the street, where he rode away on a horse which was waiting for him. The whole house was in an uproar and the members of the cast, fearing that we would be implicated, gathered in the wings and then made for the street. We left Washington as soon as possible. I returned to Baltimore and I never went on the stage again."

Public Ledger
PHILADELPHIA

MARCH 10, 1931

ACTOR WHO PLAYED FOR LINCOLN DIES

C. F. Byrne, Active Here in Politics, Was on Stage Night of Assassination

Charles Francis Byrne, 86, one of the few surviving members of the cast of "Our American Cousin," a play produced for the last time the night of April 14, 1865, at Ford's Theatre, Washington, when Abraham Lincoln was assassinated, died here at 4:20 A. M. today. He lived with his only relative, a son, Charles Thompson Byrne, at 4929 Boudinot street.

Mr. Byrne was on the stage of the theatre when the shooting took place. He saw the dying President taken from the theatre. He was playing the part of Captain DeBoots, and was in the midst of a speech when John Wilkes Booth fired the shot that killed Lincoln.

After the assassination Mr. Byrne retired from the stage and returned to Baltimore, where he remained several years before coming to Philadelphia. Byrne entered the real estate and insurance business here and lived at 18th and Diamond streets for more than twenty-three years.

Taking an active part in politics, Mr. Byrne was interested in reform movements, and was allied with the Municipal Party, of which he was president for a number of years. He later was identified with the Washington Party, and was a candidate of that party for Representative in the Legislature in 1914. He was defeated by a small majority.

He had been in general good health until eleven years ago when he suffered a paralytic stroke.

Career Ends



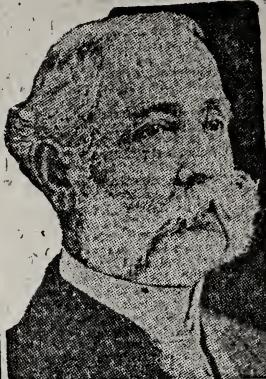
CHARLES FRANCIS BYRNE
One of last survivors of cast in play that Lincoln saw the night he was assassinated, who died here today

PHILADELPHIA

BULLETIN

3-10-31

DIES AT 86



CHARLES FRANCIS BYRNE

ACTOR WHO SAW LINCOLN SHOT DIES

Charles F. Byrne Was on Stage
of Ford's Theatre in Cast of
"Our American Cousin"

WAS CRIPPLE 11 YEARS

Charles Francis Byrne, who was on the stage of Ford's Theatre, Washington, the night Abraham Lincoln was assassinated, died last night at his son's home, 4929 Boudinot st., after a long illness. He was eighty-six.

On the night of April 14, 1865, Mr. Byrne, who was twenty, was playing "Captain DeBoots" in "Our American Cousin," produced before an audience of notables including President Lincoln.

He saw the President crumple forward in his chair, and saw John Wilkes Booth, the assassin, whom he knew well, leap to the stage and disappear.

Mr. Byrne, describing the scene many times, gave a vivid account of the assassination.

"I had been in the wing just opposite the President's box and was getting ready to enter the stage when I heard the shot. There was the President falling forward in his chair. Some one clutched at a struggling figure in the box, and then I saw it was Booth whom they were trying to hold. He leaped from the box and fell as he ran, catching his foot in some bunting on the stage."

"He was crying with pain as he passed me. Then I ran to the box, climbed up the side and saw the President with the blood streaming from his wound. Laura Keene, our leading lady, was sat his side, his head resting in her lap."

"After that all of the actors left the theatre...and I went with them."

That was Mr. Byrne's last appearance before the footlights, the incident having unnerved him to such an extent that he decided to quit the stage. He then engaged in the real estate business here.

Mr. Byrne was a cripple for eleven years, following a stroke, and was bedridden for fifteen months before his death.

He is survived by his son, Charles Thompson Byrne, and daughter-in-law, Mary T. Byrne.

CHARLES F. BYRNE DIES; SAW LINCOLN MURDERED

Former Actor Was Active In Re-
form Movements Here

Charles Francis Byrne, 86, former member of the cast of "Our American Cousin," a performance of which was dramatically climaxed by the assassination of Abraham Lincoln, died yesterday at his home, 4229 Boudinot street. He lived with a son, Charles Thompson Byrne, his only survivor.

Playing the role of Captain De Boots, Mr. Byrne was in the midst of a speech on the stage of Ford's Theatre, Washington, when John Wilkes Booth fired the shot that killed Lincoln.

Following the assassination, Mr. Byrne retired from the stage. He entered the real estate and insurance business here and lived at 18th and Diamond streets for twenty-three years.

Mr. Byrne was interested in reform movement and for a number of years was president of the Municipal Party. He later became identified with the Washington Party and was candidate for the Legislature in 1914.

Funeral services will be held Friday afternoon at his home, with burial in Odd Fellows Cemetery.

Actor Who Saw Lincoln Die Expires After Long Illness

Charles Francis Byrne, Who Witnessed Assassination When He Was 20, Quit Stage Then and Entered Business in Philadelphia.

Charles Francis Byrne, who as a youthful actor of 20, stood on the stage of Ford's Theater, Washington, the night of April 14, 1865, and saw John Wilkes Booth kill President Lincoln, died yesterday at his son's home, 4929 Boudinot st. He was 86.

Byrne was playing the role of Captain DeBoots in "Our American Cousin" before an audience of nobles, including the President.

He was standing in the wings, opposite the box in which sat the President, awaiting his cue.

Suddenly he heard a shot, saw the President crumple in his chair, then saw Booth leap to the stage and disappear. Byrne, with others, rushed forward to the box. The sight of blood

from the President's head filled him with horror, and he ran. The affair so unnerved him that he left the stage for good. He came to this city, where he entered the real estate and insurance business. For more than 20 years he lived at 18th and Diamond sts.

He was active in reform movements here, and was allied with the Municipal party, of which he was president for a number of years. He later was identified with the Washington party and was a candidate of that party for the Legislature in 1914.

Eleven years ago he was crippled by a stroke. For 15 months before his death he was bedridden.

He is survived by his son, Charles Thompson Byrne, and daughter-in-law, Mary T. Byrne.

PHILADELPHIA

3-11-31

RECORD

OBITUARY

CHARLES FRANCIS BYRNE

Philadelphian as Actor Saw Slaying
of Lincoln From Theatre Stage

Charles Francis Byrne, 86-year-old Philadelphian, who as an actor witnessed the assassination of Abraham Lincoln from the stage of Ford's Theatre, Washington, sixty-five years ago, died Monday night at the home of his son at 4929 Boudinot street.

Mr. Byrne, a cripple for eleven years, for the last fifteen months had been confined to his bed. He is survived by his son, Charles Thompson Byrne, and his daughter-in-law, Mary T. Byrne, with whom he lived.

His last appearance before the footlights was the night of April 14, 1865, when, at 20, he played "Captain De Boots" in "Our American Cousin" before President Lincoln and an audience composed of many persons prominent in Washington's official life.

Time and again he recalled to his children and to friends how Lincoln slumped in his box and how John Wilkes Booth, the assassin, leaped onto the stage and vanished through the wings.

In describing the tragedy Mr. Byrne often had said: "I had been in the wing just opposite the President's box and was getting ready to enter the stage when I heard the shot. There was the President falling forward in his chair. Someone clutched at a struggling figure in the box, and then I saw it was Booth they were trying to get. He leaped from the box and fell as he ran, catching his foot in some bunting on the stage."

Mr. Byrne left the stage immediately after the tragedy. For a time he engaged in the real estate business in Philadelphia.

P U L L A B U N D E R L A

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